

Western University

Scholarship@Western

---

SASAH 4th Year Capstone and Other Projects:  
Publications

School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and  
Humanities (SASAH)

---

Spring 4-14-2023

## SASAH Experiential Learning Final Report: FCFF Marketing Internship & Creative Writing Mentorship

Ahsif Khair Mohammad

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sasahr4pub>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Marketing Commons](#)

---

SASAH Experiential Learning Final Report  
FCFF Marketing Internship & Creative Writing Mentorship

Ahsif Khair Mohammad

Dr. Bruce

Arts & Humanities 4492G/4493G

15 April 2023

## **FCFF Marketing Internship Report**

### Introduction

My role as an intern at the Forest City Film Festival (FCFF) was to act as a concierge on the team of concierge interns, under two full-time supervisors. As far as I understood it FCFF has a somewhat flat hierarchy and our team also received a lot of input and direction from the festival director, Dorothy Downs.

Overall the role was a useful learning experience and a rewarding pursuit. I was forced to push some of my boundaries in being a concierge. And I benefited, personally, by being close to an organization and event centered around the arts.

### Insights in Retrospect

The internship wound up being a very enriching experience. First, the particulars of running a film festival helped me appreciate how unique an organization's goals and needs can be. Second, I gained a more accurate picture of my strengths and weaknesses working in an organizational setting. Third, I reconfigured my own goals with respect to new graduate careers in marketing.

In school, I have learned about different types of institutions and organizations in theory. Working at FCFF I got an in-person view of how this particular not-for-profit organization gets funding, how it attracts submissions, how it gets volunteers, and how its managers balance the organization's cultural role with its stakeholders. Getting to work closely with supervisor's and to learn about the relationships that make FCFF possible revealed the politics that come along with receiving grants, donations, and sponsorships to operate. From watching supervisor's juggle between pampering the most popular directors and the biggest donors I realized just how

unique FCFF is. The film festival relies on being given money and receiving good submissions every year in order to operate in the first place and needs to put on a festival good enough to get money next year.

The intern role's responsibilities reflect FCFF's organizational nature. London's "mid-sized" film festival is one of the only ones that provides a concierge service to directors. Further, FCFF goes to great lengths to give back to filmmakers as much as possible by way of offering them networking events etc. This is a feature of the festival that many filmmakers reported is a major draw. FCFF's unique goals and needs are reflected in the intern role too. Through being a concierge I contributed to maintaining the FCFF brand on the artist-facing side. Reflecting on my internship, I realize that my main priority was to strategically build a relationship between artists and the festival. A big weakness of mine in the role was that I do not enjoy doing this kind of work. Doing this internship helped me understand the degree to which being a networker is a skill that I need to develop not just for hiring but as a skilled kind of labour.

That said, many months after the internship there is a caveat to that, and my view has changed. Approaching graduation has been a really big deal for me as it's an important personal milestone, and I've gained a lot of clarity. Being a networker actually is something I enjoy thoroughly. I am by nature very connective, interactive, and desperate to perceive people and be perceived emotionally. Friendship and friendliness are concepts and values I treasure. In my personal life, with friends and family, I am in many ways an emotional/spiritual/philosophical anchor. What I ultimately have taken away from FCFF is that I have to be more patient with myself when being a networker in a professional sense. In the professional setting people have guards up and defer to heuristic modes of communicating emotions—I learned

it's easy to get in my head about that. It turns out I was very well received while in my head, in the moment, I felt out of pocket or just awkward doing networking duties. Despite being aware of the ontological character of being in a 'company setting', I need to get better at believing that I am well received and that my characteristic groundedness and attitude are not the reason emotional interaction is stifled.

During the festival itself in-person responsibilities of just doing what is supposed to be done felt less strenuous to me than the lead-up. Things were well organized but there were of course hiccups along the way. Despite things occasionally not going to plan, like scheduling changeups and delays, the team at FCFF was able to seamlessly improvise. Looking back, I think that the very horizontal organizational structure of FCFF allowed for a ready supply of team members with high enough involvement to know what to do in any situation. Moreover, there were tons of volunteers and the festival had access to more labour than it even needed.

The number of supervisory roles for the festivals small size also led to a lot of redundant supervision. More than a few times I was almost interrupted from my task to be conscripted for another task. And there were several times interns would complete a task then awkwardly float around until somebody in charge walked by and sent half home and the other half on a break.

I reported these observations about the festival to my supervisor, Sana, once it was over at our wrap-up meeting. I recommended it might be worth considering establishing an intern role that acts as a kind of 'lead' intern. There is a good supply of SASAH and Arts students, and it could be a good way to build organizational knowledge in the intern team. I think the FCFF should add an intern role that is a rehire from a previous year to be in charge of knowing all of the interns' current

tasks. If this intern could simply send out group messages after meetings, and act as a resource to other interns, then the amount of times supervisors need to repeat the same corrections would decrease. Additionally, during the festival this intern would be able to keep track of slack capacity among the interns much more dynamically and nudge supervisors to remind them to either send people home or assign them to new tasks.

Getting to the end of the festival was an overall rewarding experience. The end of the internship saw the fruition of our work followed by reflections that led me to a new understanding of the unique enterprise of film festivals. Finally, I realize now from doing the FCFF internship that a career in marketing is something I should not pursue, or that I want to. Completing this role made me realize that an entry level role in marketing will mostly consist of executing brand strategy, which means maintaining work relationships and communicating things up and down. Among the options ahead of me I was considering recruiting for marketing roles very seriously. After doing this internship I realized marketing is not for me. Additionally, I gained a lot of appreciation for this kind of work, just keeping up with so many moving pieces can be harder than it looks.

## Experience Report

### *August – September*

At the outset things were slow and my only real responsibilities were email correspondence and weekly meetings. In our meetings we discussed plans for the lead-up to the festival, transitioning into the actual festival, and shared updates on director correspondence.

Like the other interns I was assigned 10 directors for whom I would act as a concierge. In the initial period I sent many cut and pasted emails given by our supervisors and also independently fielded their questions. I also met with directors over zoom or a phone call. Over time I developed varying relationships with the directors. Some wanted all I offered as a concierge while others preferred to just read the updates as they came and just show up to the festival.

In this period I also gained a better sense of the festival's standard operations and grew closer with the intern team. Personally, I am terrible with email or text correspondence. Having to be consistently up to date with emails and messages was a surprisingly big challenge for me. Conversation over the phone or over zoom lent itself to my strengths and those elements of the role I found more natural.

### *October*

The final month of the internship comprised the bulk of the work. While most of the planning and groundwork was already done, as far as the directors were concerned things were just getting started. Some of my previously low-involvement contacts began sending daily emails trying to figure out file/projector specifications, hotel arrangements, festival passes, and everything in between. Others were better prepared and began seeking networking opportunities. On top of that it was time to execute the marketing strategies we planned beforehand.

I had no issues organizing a table at the UCC through the Student Council and overseeing it, or any other in-person marketing plan. I also very much enjoyed speaking with directors and communicating with them with less and less direction from supervisors. However, I did not excel where the other interns certainly did—that was where TikTok and Instagram were concerned.

A large part of the role was managing the festival's social media accounts. I thought I had a good grasp of my generation's relationship with social media—only to find that an intellectual view is far from a tangible skill. It turns out that I am very bad at social media marketing which should not have been a surprise to me given my relationship with other forms of digital communication.

October also involved the festival itself, which was a matter of knocking down the pins we meticulously set up. Getting to the end of the festival was an overall rewarding experience. The end of the internship saw the fruition of our work followed by reflections that led me to a new understanding of the unique enterprise of film festivals. Executing the event felt like such a treat after talking about it and selling it for so long. I had the opportunity, and duty actually, to do a lot of networking but not for myself. The concierge interns all received an array of directors, we each got some from each category and level of acclaim. One of the more enterprising up and coming filmmakers in my group recognized the usefulness of my role as a tool for networking. Introducing him to others and getting their ear for him interested others in the same exposure. For me, this was the most rewarding part of the internship because I felt like I was really helping some of the people I had gotten to know as a concierge.

Finally, doing the festival opened my eyes to how rewarding seasonal work can be. I realized that I actually really enjoy the idea of an entire organization's MO being an annual event. It creates a very fun team-oriented and anticipatory work culture that can be really inspiring since a sense of community can be easily cultivated when there is a clear and tangible common goal for all roles. In future, I would not be opposed to this kind of work since I dislike consistency in work life and require changing levels of difficulty.



## ***Mood Bored Creative Writing Mentorship***

### Introduction

In December of last year I started a mentorship with my former English teacher and Canadian author, Darryl Sneath. The objective was to produce, edit, and present for publication a novella between 15-18 thousand words in length.

The novella was, at mid-point, supposed to consist of 4 parts, the first of which is *Mood Bored Novelette* when considered alone. *Mood Bored* is now planned to have 3 parts, which is a much more natural narrative format than 4 acts. The story follows Lateef a 5<sup>th</sup>-year student at Western from three different perspectives, though all are his own. Coincidentally part 1 stands on its own as a story (in part because the abrupt alternate ending implies Lateef's death), so I decided to get a couple of copies printed and bound as a proof of concept. These copies at 4x6 inches in size represent the planning I have put into publication format and the portion of the mentorship concerning seeking publication.

### 3 Parts for 3 Perspectives

Part 1 of *Mood Bored* introduces Lateef and the way that he interacts with his world but it also situates him in his environment. Particularly, Lateef is having a terrible time in part 1. Many of the pitfalls he participates in are ironically in the poem *Phenomenology of Generation Z*, which is in the first part.

What Lat struggles with in part 1 really isn't putting the money together, that's all just stuff happening around him. Just as in the first poem he pens, Lateef gets too far into himself and as a result too far away from himself. For example, Lateef often situates himself with respect to his past and to larger scale events like the social

issues that consume him, in part 1. This theme is reflected in the poem *Phenomenology of Generation Z* which ironically was written, in part, with existentialist philosophy in mind. That is, philosophy which guides one away from letting the past or the bigger-picture-out-of-your-control rule one's way of being.

Part 1 ends with Lateef getting into an accident. He drunkenly falls down the stairs and part 2 takes place from a 'factory reset' version of Lateef who remembers nothing but language. The central theme of part 2 is reason.

In part 2 Lateef wants to figure things out while he has time with his thoughts and nothing but his thoughts—it occurs to me now a Descartes gag may be in order. Lateef wants to use reason to reconcile all that led him where he is in order to move forward. The central themes of part 2 are creation and discovery (Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* vibes). Lateef has to pick the pieces up and try to figure out who he was but the situation offers this extraordinary opportunity to reinvent himself however he pleases—without any reputation or past preference.

While the actual events of part 2 will contain a problem (with no recollection he learns he is indebted to drug dealers) akin to Lateef's money issue in part 1, the core theme concerns Lateef actually having access to pure interiority and realizing that a crystallized past without any present or future is Hell, but with no others.

The oxymoronic notion of being trapped in Hell without any *othering* gaze leads into part 3 in which Lateef dissolves the past and himself. He recovers from his psychogenic amnesia, synthesizing his past with who he has become. The central theme of the last section is (re)synthesis of self, where Lateef reaches a resolution as he moves on from school, on from family, on from the spectre of the past and into an open and immediate future.

## Main Aims of the Project

*Mood Bored* is an attempt to give the classic university coming-of-age story a unique treatment. Admittedly, the story is close to my actual life although fictitious. The goal of *Mood Bored* is not to be unique for the sake of it, rather it happens to be what I needed to write. To that end *Mood Bored* is a bit of a literal soul-search. However, this novella is also an attempt to manipulate text visually and lyrically to reflect the immediacy and conciseness of Generation Z.

The text looks like a poem in most places because writing in short, verse-like sentences is, for me, reflective of being a university student in 2023. One of the main goals of this project is to successfully employ this style for three things: making it easy to read, finding an approach to novel-writing that works well for me, and fill the text with more than words and sentences in a way that helps tell the story.

## Results of the Mentorship

This section is written in the context of this report being attached to *Mood Bored Draft 9* which is the most current draft (~9 thousand words). Obviously, the project was not completed. However, Sneath and I entered into this endeavour knowing that it was unlikely it would be finished within the time frame. The goal was to try anyway and in so doing gain meaningful experience as a novelist and to slingshot my debut novel project. Currently I am partway through writing part 2 and though I have no hard deadlines my goal is to complete the project by the beginning of 2024 so I can include it in my portfolio in my application to UBC's Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program. Overall, this mentorship has been the most personally rewarding course experience I have undertaken. It has given me the confidence I was seeking to pursue my dream career.

## **SASAH & My Career**

Developing *Mood Bored* and interning at FCFF were only two parts of what has been an extremely rewarding and fruitful university experience through the SASAH program.

In my presentation of my EL component I had the opportunity to consolidate what I learned throughout the 1.0 credits and also to synthesize some of the most important takeaways from university in general. As my SASAH education has empowered me to do, I did not hesitate to be scathing in my presentation where it was appropriate. In my time at FCFF I experienced a certain conversation which led me to say this in the presentation: “There is an irony in earning an Equity Diversity and Inclusion certificate from an institution called ‘Western University’ in a place called ‘London, Canada’.” (Irony because the themes of Canadian colonialism are strong in this original colonial capital).

In writing I prefer to say less, since it is my policy not to start witch-hunts using my own name and because I knew it was a genuine mistake—despite the fact it revealed a worrying approach and perspective. I only mention it here to explain that access to the SASAH community has been very edifying for me. For me, having the presentation as an opportunity to express what I observed publicly was a very positive experience. In general, my experiences in SASAH have emboldened me to be honest even if I have to be the first to do so. Which, I admittedly relish.

Presenting *Mood Bored* was also a great experience because it is hard to find a group of people who share a continuing interest in the Arts & Humanities that are so supportive. In particular, the sort of student who is drawn to SASAH is my primary target audience for the novella. Having access to that and seeing their reactions to how I presented the project was very useful research for my project going forward.

Moreover, the other SASAH students brought wonderful insights and experiences of their own to their respective presentations. I always enjoy the opportunity to see what SASAH students are up to because they are so inspiring. Generally, watching everyone else's presentations gave me important access to what some of the beating hearts of Western's Arts programs are up to. Given that *Mood Bored* is set at Western, understanding their experiences, goals, and desires was a useful research tool. In particular, Kirat's presentation really stood out to me since his project was very similar. I always enjoy hearing about how others practice creative writing since as a writer I love to steal so often. Hearing what worked and what didn't helped clarify some of my considerations ahead, especially regarding exposure and publication.

During the EL experiences themselves, and in my life in general, I drew a lot on my learnings from SASAH. To be honest, I cannot express properly what SASAH has meant to me here. Suffice it to say, my SASAH education has prepared me for challenges far beyond the obvious. In my internship, mentorship, and in my wider life I use skills I learned in SASAH to be investigative, critical, and a leader. One example was in my FCFF experience. I am proud of how I comported myself, how I dealt with the good and bad things I observed, and how I decided to deal with it which wound up being the most productive way I could.

In conclusion, SASAH and these experiences have been major forces in shaping the direction of my life and my career from here. I have always thought of Ivey as the practical aspect of my education and SASAH/Philosophy as the passion pursuit. On the other side of it I can say the truth is the reverse. Studying at Ivey has enabled me to put myself in an ideal position (through accredited reputation) to fulfill my life's greatest passion: uplifting, protecting, and providing for those I love and

those who sacrificed everything to get me here. Studying SASAH/Philosophy is the practical aspect because the skills and experience I gained through the Arts & Humanities have provided me with the skills and exposure I need to live and work in this society with *humanity*.

The impact of this on my career path is that I am a human first, and nobody can take that away from me—not even myself. Through SASAH and my EL experiences I know what I will not be doing professionally. I know now that my criteria for a job are different than most and that it is not only okay but necessary. Somebody has to tell McKinsey to stick it! More importantly, somebody has to care about the moral and social responsibility/accountability of our big institutions and leaders. SASAH has shown me that no voice is too small, and doing what one believes in is never a truly lonely path even when it seems that way. After all, nobody said that *leading with humanity* would be easy ... I just never thought it would be quite so hard. And I have never been more excited for a challenge than this one.